

Chapter Eleven: Collaboration



Section 11.1 Purpose

Cross-system collaboration has become far more common with the increased needs of homeless families and decreased availability of resources.

Developing good working relationships with programs internal to the local educational agency (LEA) and with agencies outside the LEA increases the likelihood that homeless children, youth, and families will be identified and provided assistance to obtain educational and other needed services.

Section 11.2 What the McKinney-Vento Act Requires

Overall, the McKinney-Vento Act places a strong emphasis on collaboration as a means of meeting the needs of homeless students. Local liaisons and LEAs are required to serve homeless children and youth by coordinating with school personnel and community service agencies. Issues and activities that must be addressed through coordination and collaboration include

- identifying homeless students;
- facilitating transportation services;
- obtaining school and other records;
- identifying and implementing services appropriate for students who are homeless due to awaiting foster care placement;
- providing education and related services for all homeless students, including access and reasonable proximity to the services; and
- raising the awareness of school personnel and service providers about the effects of short-term stays in a shelter and other challenges associated with homelessness (ED, 2004, F-2, I-2, G-10).

Appendix 11.A McKinney-Vento Law and Guidance Related to Collaboration provides key excerpts of the mandates that focus on collaboration.

Section 11.3 Collaborative Partners

Your State Coordinator may help you identify agencies to contact in order to develop collaborative partnerships. Some parts of the law and related guidance refer to specific programs as required partners (e.g., Head Start), while others refer to general services and types of organizations. To meet the needs of homeless students, liaisons must have a diverse network of collaborative partners, as students experiencing homelessness have many needs beyond what schools have the ability to address on their own. Assisting families through referrals for additional services, such as housing, medical, dental, and social services, can increase stability and ensure students are ready to learn when they reach the classroom.

The following are examples of community partners that could be extremely helpful to liaisons in meeting the needs of homeless students:

- community food pantries;
- local health professionals who will volunteer services to help meet dental, health, and mental health needs;
- local Boys and Girls Clubs, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, United Way, Salvation Army, and other shelter providers;
- local businesses and business associations involved in community service; and
- postsecondary education institutions.

Appendix 11.B Collaborations Required by Law provides more information about organizations and programs specifically named in the McKinney-Vento Act as mandated partners for collaboration related to the education of homeless children and youth.

In addition to programs or organizations outside the LEA, the following are examples of programs within the LEA that offer services and are required to collaborate on behalf of homeless students:

- Title I, Part A;
- special education;
- USDA school nutrition;
- gifted and talented;
- vocational education; and
- alternative education. (See Section 16 Related Legislation for information on collaborating with specific programs.)

Strategies to Facilitate Coordination and Collaboration Between Title I and the McKinney-Vento Act

- Local liaisons should attend Title I conferences and in-services, and Title I Coordinators should attend homeless education conferences and in-service professional development.
- Liaisons should work with Title I coordinators on a plan that identifies ways that Title I, Part A will serve children and youth experiencing homelessness. The plan should also be reflected in the district's Title I application for funds.
- Title I and homeless education handbooks should be shared with other program staff.
- The homeless education program should collect concrete data on the needs of homeless children and youth and share the data within and across districts.
- The LEA should initiate efforts to make organizational (cross-program) accommodations for eligible students, as necessary, in such areas as transportation, remaining in the school of origin, records transfer, class scheduling, and special services that will help them enroll, attend, and succeed in school.
- Title I school improvement plans should include the needs of highly mobile students.
- Information on district-wide policies, procedures, and guidelines to identify and serve eligible students should be established and widely disseminated.
- The State Committee of Practitioners should include LEA homeless liaison representation; liaisons willing to participate should discuss opportunities to do so with their state office for Title I.
- Title I parental involvement policies should include homeless parents and create opportunities for homeless parents to be involved.

Based on the Symposium on Homeless Education and Title I - Hosted by U.S. Department of Education and the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE), 2001

Section 11.4 Benefits

Establishing and building collaborations can be a daunting task for liaisons with multiple responsibilities. However, coordinating services and working with other programs and agencies can lead to substantial benefits for both homeless students and liaisons alike. Appendix 11.C Basic Tips for Collaboration contains some considerations for partnerships at every level of development. Some of the benefits that liaisons can reap by incorporating partnerships into their daily work include the following:

- Knowledge of basic information about the community related to issues impacting students and available services, such as knowledge of the locations of all the shelters that accept children and youth in the area and familiarity with the staff at these institutions, can expedite enrollment and connections to transportation.
- Familiarity with low-income motels and their managers can facilitate enrollment for students and increase the identification of students who might otherwise be overlooked.
- Connections with local agencies can lead to a simple list of phone numbers and contacts for local resources, which can be a handy reference when liaisons or school staff members receive unexpected calls for specific services.
- Supportive resources in the community can make homeless families' lives safer, more secure, and more stable when liaisons link families to them. In this way, liaisons can be instrumental in ensuring a coordinated delivery of services by bringing community agencies together.
- Training cafeteria and school nutrition staff on homelessness can increase the identification of homeless students and their access to basic needs.

While the preceding list provides some general examples of the benefits that can result in working with other programs, the following information provides some real life examples of successes achieved by liaisons and their partners.

- A liaison in Colorado created a partnership with city HOME program administrators. The project provided transitional living and other housing assistance to families identified as homeless by the school district while repurposing vacant housing in the area.

- A liaison in Montana established a relationship with a local restaurant that provided meals to homeless unaccompanied youth.
- A district in North Carolina worked with the local mental health agency to provide intensive counseling and crisis services to students.
- Arizona schools worked with Title I to ensure that formerly homeless students received transportation to their schools of origin for the rest of the school year after they obtained permanent housing.
- A district in Arkansas collaborated with several volunteers, seamstresses, and donors to provide items to juniors and seniors for prom. While not a basic need, the project allowed students to fully participate in school activities by attending an event in which they would be unable to participate otherwise.

11.6 Useful Links

Early Childhood and Family Homelessness Resource List
U. S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families

https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ece/acf_homeless_resource_list.pdf

Tip Sheet: Strategies for Increasing Early Childhood Services for Homeless Children

U. S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families

https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ece/acf_homeless_strategies.pdf

Section 11.7 Resources and Tools for Chapter Eleven

Appendix 11.A McKinney-Vento Act and Guidance Related to Collaboration

Appendix 11.B Collaborations Required by Law

Appendix 11.C Basic Tips for Collaboration